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REMARKS BY MAYOR SHARPE JAMES

CITY OF NEWARK

SECOND ANNUAL HOLOCAUST OBSERVANCE

TUESDAY, MAY 2, 1989

Bishop Smith, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Newark; Rev. Rogers, Rabbi Lewis, Rev. Hatfield, who is hosting us today in this beautiful, historical church-- other reverend clergy, my colleagues and friends, the City of Newark is pleased to join with the organizations listed in your program in hosting our second annual Days of Remembrance observance.

This year, 1989, marks the fiftieth anniversary of the invasion and defeat of Poland by the Nazis which triggered World War II. Beginning in 1933 and continuing until the allied victory in 1945, the Nazis also launched another war against humanity which resulted in the state-sanctioned annihilation of six million Jews and victimization of millions more.

While the world sat in silence, Adolph Hitler and his followers pursued their mad dream of world conquest and the destruction of a people who had withstood persecution, slavery, segregation and isolation for over 5,000 years.

While such acts may be difficult for many to comprehend, we as black Americans know firsthand what one man or government can do to another. We too were snatched from our own lands and sold into slavery. We have seen our people massacred, slaughtered and beaten. And, we have lived through our own government's "Jim Crow" era. Atrocities in the 20th century are as real today as they were 2,000 years ago.

We cannot obliterate the events of the Holocaust from our memory any more than we can forget the murders and lynching of our own people. We must understand that the depths of evil and depravity know no limits...and once we understand this, it will be impossible for us to forget.

When our Jewish friends stand up and vow "never again," we understand fully. Our experiences may be somewhat different, but the same hate and bigotry that fueled the Holocaust, fueled segregation and slavery, and continues today in the form of Apartheid, racism and neo-Nazism.

Leon Bass, a World War II American Army veteran who helped liberate the death camps and is black, has often spoken publicly of his experience. He talks of the pain of rejection and segregation that plagued his Army career. But in April 1945 when he helped liberate Buchenwald, Leon Bass said he learned that day that the pain of racism was not his alone.

We truly are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. That is why this program today is an ecumenical effort to commemorate the Holocaust and to pledge to ourselves and one another that we will never again remain silent to the misdeeds of others.

The noted writer and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, remarks, "The victims perished not only because of the killers, but also because of the apathy of the bystanders. What astonished us after the torment, after the tempest was not that so many killers killed, but that so few cared about us at all."

As I often do during these occasions, I would like to close with the words of a great Jewish leader, whose congregation was, for many years, located here in Newark on Clinton Avenue. This man was also a great civil rights activist, who stood with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr during the historic 1963 March on Washington..

To quote from the late Rabbi Prinz: "When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned in my life, and under those tragic circumstances is that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most tragic, and the most shameful problem is silence."

We must always remember the lessons of the Holocaust and continue to speak out for justice, equality and peace until all the people of this world are free.

Thank you.